

12/07/2009 This Week in Congress

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December 7, 2009

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress."

President Announces Afghanistan Strategy

The President announced a new strategy for the war in Afghanistan this week that calls for the deployment of 30,000 additional American service members. At the same time, the President also put in place a timetable for the withdrawal of these troops.

In a poll on my web site, Kansans overwhelmingly agreed that the President should deploy more troops to Afghanistan as recommended by General Stanley McChrystal. About 80 percent of respondents felt the President should follow the general's recommendations. The upcoming months will tell us whether these additional resources are sufficient.

Agriculture Subcommittee Reviews Economic Effects of Cap and Trade

The House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy, and Research held two hearings this week to review the economic impacts of cap and trade on agriculture producers, agribusinesses and rural residents. Witnesses included the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Chief Economist, Dr. Joe Glauber, as well as other economists and experts from universities across the nation. Although specific estimates varied, all witnesses agreed that costs for fuel, fertilizer and other inputs would increase under H.R. 2454, the Waxman-Markey cap and trade legislation, which passed the House of Representatives this summer. In addition, USDA estimates show that cap and trade could lead to nearly 60 million acres being taken out of agricultural production and planted to trees, causing increases in food and feed prices.

I believe the cap and trade bill passed by the House remains one of the most damaging pieces of legislation ever passed by the chamber during my time in Congress as far as its effects on agriculture. The legislation puts a tax on energy use and may cause agricultural processors to leave rural America for countries where production costs are lower. I will continue to work with my colleagues to prevent cap and trade from becoming law and harming the Kansas economy. [Click here](#) to listen to a clip from my opening statement at Wednesday's hearing.

Supporting Tax Relief for Teachers

The economic recession is increasingly leaving America's teachers to foot the bill for the basic classroom needs of students. More and more teachers are forced to spend money out-of-pocket on classroom supplies as school districts trim their budgets amidst declining revenues and state budget cuts. I sponsored legislation this week to help teachers who spend their own money on classroom supplies for their students. H.R. 3758, the Teacher Tax Relief Act, would increase the tax deduction for teachers purchasing classroom supplies from \$250 to \$500, make the deduction permanent and expand the deduction to include expenses associated with qualified professional development pursuits.

Reports found that for the 2005-2006 school year, educators spent an average of \$826 for supplies and \$926 for instructional materials. These numbers have likely only increased as state and school district budgets have worsened. Educating America's young people is critical to the future of our country and economy. Teachers should not be left to pay for the resources necessary to make sure students do not fall behind. This tax deduction will help them prepare students for success.

House Will Vote on Iran Sanctions

While there are many issues here in our country that demand our attention, we must not forget about dangers around the world, particularly in Iran. For months, I have been warning my colleagues about the danger posed by Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. Iran has called for a world without both the U.S. and Israel. A nuclear-armed Iran is a threat to American troops in the region and Israel; would likely embolden terrorist groups Hamas and Hezbollah; and could lead to a perilous nuclear arms race in the Middle East.

On Monday, I sent Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi a letter encouraging her to allow the House to vote on H.R. 2194, the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act, before the House adjourned for the year. Enactment of this legislation, which has the support of more than 300 representatives, could put enough pressure on Iran that it would stop uranium enrichment and comply with international demands. I was pleased on Thursday that the Speaker responded and that the House plans to vote on H.R. 2194 the week of December 14th.

Attending Fort Riley Deployment Ceremony

On Friday, I attended a deployment ceremony of the U.S. Army's 1st Infantry Headquarters Division at Fort Riley. Approximately 900 soldiers, including Commanding General Vincent Brooks, will soon deploy and take command of multiple brigade combat teams in southeast Iraq. General Brooks will continue to serve from the Middle East as Fort Riley's senior commander but will be turning local operations over to Brigadier General David Petersen, who comes to Fort Riley after serving as assistant division commander for the 35th Infantry Division at Fort Leavenworth. I wished the deploying troops safety and success in their mission. My prayers are with all of our service members and their families. [Click here to view photos from the ceremony.](#)

Learning about Groundbreaking Initiatives at The University of Kansas Hospital

I visited The University of Kansas Hospital in Kansas City on Tuesday to learn about some of the groundbreaking quality initiatives that have helped transform it into one of the top-ranked hospitals in the country. This year, the hospital, which has cared for patients from every county in our state, ranked second in quality among academic medical centers nationwide.

During my visit, I met with many doctors and administrators, including Dr. Steven Simpson, founder of the Midwest Critical Care Collaborative. Dr. Simpson told me about an initiative that has helped dramatically reduce mortality at the hospital by focusing on early diagnosis and treatment of severe sepsis, a serious medical condition that can lead to organ dysfunction. Critical access hospitals in central and western Kansas will take part in the initiative to better treat the illness.

I also met Dr. William Reed, chairman of the hospital's Department of Cardiovascular Diseases, and Renee Walters, who described efforts that have led to the hospital being listed on the U.S. News & World Report's list of best hospitals for heart surgery for three consecutive years. Additionally, I enjoyed visiting with KU Medical Center Vice Chancellor for Research Dr. Paul Terranova, CFO Scott Glasrud, Dr. Lowell Tilzer, Shirley Weber, Dr. Tim Williamson and Doug Peterson. Thanks to COO/Chief Nursing Officer Tammy Peterman, a native of Stockton, for hosting me on my visit.

Visiting Ransom in Ness County

On Monday morning, I stopped in Ransom to visit with residents. I spoke with folks at Deines Manufacturing, which makes commercial lawnmowers; Holly's repair shop; First State Bank; the Post Office; and Farmers Co Op. Like most Kansans I visit with, folks in Ransom are concerned about health care, government spending and the increasing role of government in their lives.

From Washington to Home: Big First Listening Tour Continues

My 13th annual listening tour is nearing completion, as I have now held town hall meetings in 61 of the "Big First"

Congressional District's 69 counties. This week, I met with Kansans in Scott, Lane, Saline and Haskell Counties. Before my town hall meeting in Lane County, I stopped at the county courthouse in Dighton to visit with the folks there. The conversations I have at town hall meetings across Kansas give me direction in Washington, D.C. [Click here to view the listening tour schedule](#) and to see where I have already stopped this year. [Click here to view photos from my town hall meetings in Saline and Haskell Counties.](#)

In the Office

State Representative Peter DeGraff and his wife, Karen, of Mulvane; State Representative Joe Seiwert and his wife, Linda, of Pretty Prairie; and State Senator Bob Marshall of Fort Scott were in to visit. Virleen Carlson of Junction City came by for a tour of the United States Capitol.

Very truly yours,

Jerry